

| R e p r i n t |



The law of hospitality

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Prologue

In an essay entitled *The Odyssean suitors and the host-guest relationship*¹ Professor Harry L. Levy discussed the final scene of the *Odyssey* and took issue with those authors who find it out of character with the spirit of the work as a whole. The apparent anomaly introduced by the unmerciful slaughter of the suitors whose faults went hardly beyond a certain absence of decorum he explained by the hypothesis of an earlier folk-tale in the peasant tradition which is evident elsewhere in the poem, he says. This is intertwined with the courtly tradition of the warrior princes which dominates the greater part. The ideal of courtly largesse is contrasted with the more material concerns of frugal farmers whose customs of hospitality contain a provision forbidding the guest to overstay his welcome and impoverish his host. Leaving to classical scholars the task of unravelling the origin of its elements, the anthropologist is entitled to take the story as it stands and attempt to relate it to what he can discover of the law of hospitality in general and of the code of hospitality of ancient Greece in particular. It appears to me that, regardless of any historical disparities in the sources from which it originated, the tale of the home-coming of Odysseus may take its place among those exemplary epics which provide us with a key to the principles of social conduct. Indeed the whole work may be viewed as a study in the law of hospitality, in other words, the problem of how to deal with strangers.

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1 Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Society, 1963.

I

In one of the earliest professional monographs we have, Boas describes the custom whereby the Central Eskimo tribes receive a stranger and the curious combat to which he is then challenged:

If a stranger unknown to the inhabitants of a settlement arrives on a visit he is welcomed by the celebration of a great feast. Among the south-eastern tribes the natives arrange themselves in a row, one man standing in front of it. The stranger approaches slowly, his arms folded and his head inclined toward the right side. Then the native strikes him with all his strength [94] on the right cheek [sic] and in his turn inclines his head awaiting the stranger's blow (*tighuiqdjung*). While this is going on the other men are playing at ball and singing (*igdlukitaqtung*). Thus they continue until one of the combatants is vanquished. The ceremonies of greeting among the western tribes are similar to those of the eastern, but in addition 'boxing, wrestling and knife testing' are mentioned by travellers who have visited them. In Davis Strait and probably in all the other countries the game of 'hook and crook' is always played on the arrival of a stranger (*pakijumijartung*). Two men sit down on a large skin, after having stripped the upper part of their bodies, and each tries to stretch out the bent arm of the other. These games are sometimes dangerous, as the victor has the right to kill his adversary; but generally the feast ends peaceably. The ceremonies of the western tribes in greeting a stranger are much feared by their eastern neighbours and therefore intercourse is somewhat restricted. The meaning of the duel, according to the natives themselves, is 'that the two men in meeting wish to know which of them is the better man'.²

We can hardly suggest that such a desire to measure oneself against the stranger is peculiar to people of simple social organisation and dispersed settlements, as one might at first be tempted to imagine, for the custom in spirit if not in form, is reminiscent of the age of chivalry when knights on meeting found it necessary to test the 'valour' or 'value' of their new acquaintance, and we may therefore surmise that it springs from something fundamental in the nature of relations with strangers, such as a necessity to evaluate them in some way or other against the standards of the community.

Take the elements of the custom:

1. The feast offered to celebrate the stranger's arrival;
2. The challenge, issued to determine the stranger's worth;
3. The forms of the combat which estimate it in terms of the strength in his right arm;
4. His possible execution if he is proved inferior; and
5. The peaceful conclusion which is generally achieved, and which we may suspect to have been the intended outcome.

We are not told how often the right to execute the defeated stranger was, in fact, exerted. It is not essential that it should ever have been, for the belief that the right existed must surely have been enough to terrify the potential visitor from the East,

2 F. Boas, *The Central Eskimo* (Washington, 1887), p. 609. Strangers are greeted with a feast in many parts of the world and are also frequently subject to a contest of skill or strength.

particularly since duels inspired by vengeance also led to the execution of the loser. The existence of the right rather than the determination to exert it is all we require in order to understand the literal significance of the institution. [96]

At the risk of appearing to throw my comparative net too wide, I would point out that the entry of an outsider into any group is commonly the occasion for an 'ordeal' of some sort, whether among British public schoolboys, freemasons or the initiates of the secret societies of Africa, but in these instances the character of the ordeal as a test of worthiness is less important than its character as an initiation rite. They might all be considered as 'rites of incorporation',³ a variety of the rites of passage through which an old status is abandoned and a new one acquired. In this case it is the status of stranger which is lost and that of community member which is gained.

The social structure of Eskimo communities is notoriously flexible, yet it can hardly be supposed that a single occasion can admit a newcomer to full membership while he is still unacquainted with the other members of the settlement – the 'ordeal' of the British schoolboy lasts a whole year. The ordeal of the Eskimo would decide rather his right to remain, assuming he was either victorious or spared. Yet during the time he remained, what exactly would his status be? The combat enables the standing of the new member to be established within the hierarchy of prestige. From then on he is known to be a better man or not than his challenger. Unfortunately Boas tells us nothing more about the relationship which may have existed thereafter between the two men and it would be normal to assume, therefore, that it was in no way peculiar. Nevertheless, braving the bad name which speculation has rightly acquired in anthropology and on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, I should like to speculate on the relationship which subsisted between the stranger and his challenger, for such a guess would enable me to link up the Eskimo custom in this regard with that, so different in every way, of classical antiquity. The guess however does not claim to establish, but only at best to illustrate, the association between the two forms of custom which will be shown to derive from a common sociological root at a more abstract level.

Fustel de Coulanges explains that in the city of antiquity a stranger possessed no status in law nor in religion and that it was necessary for him to have a patron in order to gain the protection of the local laws and Gods. To offend the newcomer was to offend his patron since by the code of hospitality the two were allied in this way. 'L'étranger se rattachait par cet intermédiaire à la cité'.⁴ The provisions of Arab hospitality are not dissimilar in this respect; indeed, in many countries similar customs are found.

In contrast to a member of the community whose status is identifiable by reference to its norms and is recognised by everyone, the stranger is incorporated only through a personal bond with an established member; [97] he has, as it were, no direct jural relationship with anyone else, no place within the system, no status save that of stranger (which is a kind of self-contradiction: the status of being statusless). On the other hand, in relation to his patron he possesses, however little

3 'Rite d'intégration', in the words of A. van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*. Paris, (1909).

4 Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité antique* (Paris, 15^e éd., 1895), p. 232.

may be known about him,⁵ a clearly defined status, that of guest or client, which makes any further evaluation of him unnecessary. The status of guest therefore stands midway between that of hostile stranger and that of community member. He is incorporated practically rather than morally.

The essence of the stranger is, tautologically enough, that he is unknown. He remains potentially anything: valiant or worthless, well born, well connected, wealthy or the contrary, and since his assertions regarding himself cannot be checked, he is above all not to be trusted. For this reason the charlatan is always, must be, a stranger. In any case his social standing in his community of origin is not necessarily accepted by the people of another. For it is a matter of local pride that each community would set up its standards for itself rather than accept those which are dictated by foreigners. In this sense, every community aspires to autonomy. Therefore the status achieved in one is not directly transferable to another, nor is the status ascribed by one society necessarily recognised in another; indeed the possibility of finding an equivalent at all may very well be missing — you cannot be a Brahmin in the English countryside.⁶

The stranger therefore starts afresh as an individual insofar as he may be incorporated into the community. It must make its own evaluation of him in order to accept him. The simple logic of the Eskimo custom is apparent: lacking a wider society and a hierarchy of social status, the value of a man is no more than the literal strength in his right arm.

The problem of the treatment of the stranger includes another aspect. Does he possess the necessary knowledge of the culture of the people among whom he comes to behave correctly and make evaluations of conduct by their standards? Can he, in a word, subscribe to the rules of their culture? As a newcomer he will never know from the outset how to behave towards individual personalities, but if he knows the rules he will quickly distinguish who is who. No knowledge of persons is required of the guest who has a patron to protect him, but to fulfil the role of guest he must at least understand the conventions which relate to hospitality and which define the behaviour expected of him. Hence the distinction which the Greeks made between *Xenoi*, strangers who were nevertheless Greeks, and *Barbaroi*, outlandish foreigners who spoke another language. Franz Boas does not

5 According to Farès, ancient Arab custom forbade asking the guest who he was, where he came from or where he was going (B. Farès, *L'honneur chez les Arabes avant l'Islam*, Paris, 1932, p. 95). Similarly Odysseus was asked such questions only as he was leaving Phaeacia.

6 Even within a single society whose communities are roughly similar in structure, an individual easily forfeits his status when away from home. The point was made tellingly by a plebeian member of the town of Alcalá; to a drunken summer visitor who attempted to patronise him he answered: 'You may be Don Fulano de Tal in your own home, but here you're just sh. .t' (the story is probably apocryphal; I have only the testimony of the speaker that he actually said the words). In accordance with the same notions the system of nicknames in the townships of Andalusia seldom recognises an outsider by any identity other than the place of his origin. Only exceptionally and after many years of residence will he acquire a nickname which defines him as an individual, that is, as a member of the community. Since place of birth is what defines the essential nature of the individual, an outsider can never become totally incorporated. Cf. J. Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (London, 1954).

tell us, stranger as he was to the Eskimo, that he was obliged to wrestle with his right arm for his life and we may assume that the ceremony to which he referred was limited to other Eskimos [98] who were practised in the art of such a combat and sensitive to the honour conveyed by a feast of walrus blubber, that is, to strangers capable of becoming incorporated, not 'barbarians'.

Let us suppose that the stranger's appearance in the community where he had neither kin nor friends constituted in itself a challenge to which the local challenger was doing in reality no more than respond in the name of his group, its self-appointed champion. He is likely therefore to be the chief or the strongest man within it, or at least one who claims to be so. It would follow that if the stranger defeats him, he is proved superior to all and this fact would entitle him to be honoured by the whole community. The precedence accorded to a guest may here be paid by everyone to recognised worth. Honour is gained by all through the visit of a superior person, since in accordance with its paradoxical nature it is gained by being paid (and lost by being denied) where it is due. Moreover, it seems most improbable that the theoretical right to execute the defeated champion could be exerted where he was surrounded by his kin and the stranger was alone. On the other hand, in the instance where the stranger was defeated it seems unlikely that the right to execute him would be exerted unless he was suspected of coming with sinister covert intentions such as to avenge a blood-feud or commit a felony. Eskimos are known to change the affiliation of their community not infrequently, as Boas points out, and it hardly appears likely that this could be done only at grave mortal risk. Moreover they do not have the reputation of a bloodthirsty people who slaughter one another for glory. On the contrary their distaste for exhibitions of anger and violence has earned them the title of 'The Gentle People'. Is it not likely that this right to execute the defeated stranger existed *normally* only to be waived, establishing the fact that subsequent to his defeat, he 'owed his life' to his conqueror? The fact would surely find some social recognition in a kind of bond; when one has fought for one's life against someone, lost and been spared, one can hardly resume the relationship of mere acquaintances, especially in a society, like the Eskimo among so many others, where lives may be owed, avenged or commuted into payment. May I not infer that the defeated stranger became some kind of client to the man who had conquered him who became in this way responsible for him in the eyes of the community? Under such conditions his vanquisher would, in fact, have been literally responsible for his presence there, having preferred not to exert his theoretical right to kill him. The struggle, condemnation and pardon at the hands of his victor follow a well-known sequence of social death and rebirth into a changed status.

My guess — or is it mere phantasy? — amounts to this: the stranger who was recognised as the better man was accorded universal respect [99] which posed no problem of his precedence within the community, whatever his subsequent relationship to his antagonist, while he who was defeated was thereafter 'attached to the community by the intermediary' of his victor. Those who know the Eskimo may have views about the the [sic] possible or probable existence of such a relationship which might conceivably, among a people so addicted to the notion of artificial kinship, have taken this form in the same way as war-captives are sometimes integrated into the lineage of their captors or as Dr Birket-Smith was

adopted by his Eskimo host,⁷ but my aim is not to make any contribution to their studies. The purpose of this imaginary ethnography, embroidering the solid work of Boas, is only to offer an exercise in the logic of social relations, the scales which one may practise before attempting to interpret the infinitely complex score of reality.⁸

II

We have dealt so far only with the social aspect of the problem posed by the stranger, unknown and perhaps unversed in the culture of the local community. The simplest solution of all – and one which was followed by many peoples while they were permitted to do so – was to refuse recognition to any person unable to claim an attachment of kinship with the tribe, that is, to treat the stranger simply as an outlaw who could be spoiled or destroyed with impunity. Such hostility towards him hardly requires an explanation since the threat which he represents to established norms and to the sanctioned order of society is patent, apart from any imagined dangers, natural or supernatural, which, in the absence of any knowledge of him, he may incarnate. Even when not suspect as a vampire or a child-stealer, the stranger is always potentially hostile. How then are we to explain that particular relationship, discussed by Professor Levy, between the stranger and Zeus?⁹ The idea that the chief of the Gods should choose to adopt such a disguise, that the most sacred of all should be allied to the outsider, must surely appear as something of an anomaly, especially to those who, following Malinowski, would expect to find in mythology a ‘charter’ for the social system. Taken at its face value the myth appears to contradict the first principle of social organisation: that every community must possess its own particular standards which are held sacred, ordained by the Gods and opposed to the customs of foreigners.

Let us examine the possible interpretations of this belief. To begin with, the stranger is also the beggar, since they both belong to the category of persons to whom hospitality is due. The fact that the God took the form of the stranger or beggar ensured the enforcement of the moral [100] duty of hospitality upon which the free circulation of persons between Greek communities depended.⁹ It may be viewed, then, as a sanction supporting a system of undifferentiated exchange: do as

7 K. Birket-Smith, *The Eskimos* (London, 1959), p. 173. It is significant that the officiants at rites of passage frequently establish through them relationships of ritual kinships, as for example in the instance of godparenthood.

8 I admit none the less to a certain satisfaction when it was confirmed to me by Mr Keith Basso who was then immersed in Eskimo ethnography that there is indeed one tribe among whom the stranger, defeated in the ordeal of entry, is made the ritual kinsman of his victor. Here however the contest took the form of a wrestling match of which the object was to kick the opponents’ legs away from under him. Strength in the right leg, not arm, was the measure of superiority as indeed it is among the football fans of modern society.

9 ‘L’humeur voyageuse et sociale des Grecs, les fêtes, les besoins du commerce et très souvent aussi les exils politiques rendent toujours l’hospitalité nécessaire dans toutes les parties du monde grec’ (Ch. Daremberg and E. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, vol. III, Paris, 1900, p. 294).

you would be done by; receive the stranger well so that when you travel you may be well received. Taken in this sense the myth furnishes a charter for the code of hospitality, but such a teleological explanation can hardly be held sufficient to explain the *existence* of the belief since, quite apart from any methodological strictures, a similar code of hospitality towards the stranger exists in the Arab world unsupported by any such charter and is regarded there as a *sacred* duty none the less. The notion of hospitality derives in this instance from the sacredness of the womenfolk of the household.¹⁰ Moreover, in both the Arab¹¹ and the Greek world, by dispensing hospitality honour was acquired within the community and allies outside it and considerations of personal advantage are thereby added to the general utility of the association between the stranger and the sacred. Yet they do not explain it. Granted the function of the association, the anomaly remains. For however convenient it may be in terms of the consequences to identify God with the stranger, whether as potentially the same person (Levy's little tradition) or as patron and client (Levy's great tradition), we can hardly suppose that a system of religious thought can be made to submit to anomalies uniquely for the sake of facilitating political and economic relations. Even the argument that the supreme God was the patron of all Greeks in opposition to local deities whose protection was geographically limited is insufficient, even were there no other objections to it, to account for the *priority* of the stranger in Zeus' favour and his connection with the sacred. In fact the stranger was not necessarily Zeus, but any God in disguise.

A more complete explanation can be deduced from a general consideration of the association between divinity and the unknown. Omniscience is a divine attribute and one which is jealously guarded. The moral lessons put forward in the Book of Genesis regarding the Tree of Knowledge or the myths of Icarus or Prometheus are quite unequivocal: the Gods possess knowledge which is forbidden to mankind and are prepared to punish any attempt to encroach upon their privilege. Their ineffability is the essence of their divinity. The esoteric character of communication with them and the mystery of their presence and their will (which follows none of the standards of human conduct) are the basis of the fear which they inspire. Once comprehended they would no longer be revered. Human knowledge desecrates by rendering known (and therefore secular) that which was mysterious (and therefore sacred), by reducing to the level of the known world that which is essentially [101] unknowable. The character of the sacred as the inversion of the secular is implicit in all mythologies, those which define the

10 Cf. A. H. Abou-Seid, 'Honour and Shame among the Bedouins of Egypt', J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: the values of Mediterranean Society* (London, 1965). So powerful is this idea that every home becomes a sanctuary guarded by the honour of the owner who is in duty bound to receive any fugitive who ask for refuge. Even his own enemy can demand sanctuary of him, and rest assured of protection against himself, since his obligation to respect the sanctity of his own home takes precedence over his right and desire for vengeance. It should be noted however that the sacredness of the home makes it a sanctuary only to the stranger, not to the fellow-member of the community. Further instances of the association between the sacred and the stranger are given by A. M. Hocart, in 'The Divinity and the Guest', *The Life-giving Myth* (London, 1935).

11 Bishr Farès, *L'honneur chez les Arabes avant l'Islam* (Paris, 1932).

status of the Gods or those which recount the origins of the world.¹² Both types of myth set the bounds of the mortal world and, doing so, establish the gradations of proximity to the Divine in space and in time. The mortal world is confined by an inversion of that which preceded it and that which lies beyond it. For this reason, we find Gods of foreign origin in so many parts of the world and for this reason also no prophet is accepted in his own country. In the light of this general principle the association between the God and the stranger appears generic, and the sacredness of hospitality and the honour which it confers *derive* not from any functional consequence of the belief but from the fact that the meeting with the stranger is a confrontation between the known world and the realms of mystery. The stranger belongs to the 'extra-ordinary' world, and the mystery surrounding him allies him to the sacred¹³ and makes him a suitable vehicle for the apparition of the God,¹⁴ the revelation of a mystery. Therefore, to put it in the phrasing of the popular epigram, it was not in the least odd of God to choose the Jews, but on the contrary exactly what the anthropologist should expect of Him. The ambiguity of their status, as at the same time belonging and not belonging, within the gates yet beyond the pale, and their reputation as the possessors of cryptic knowledge, the initiates of the mysteries of finance and of precious metals, made them strangers *par excellence*, perfectly endowed to be chosen both to provide the God in the beginning and to remain thereafter as his renegade kin. For this reason they were the 'sacred of the left hand' and the natural associates of the fallen angel. That these 'internalised strangers' should have served for centuries as the focus of the ambivalences of their Christian neighbours is in no way surprising; what is surprising is that psychological studies of anti-semitism should not all start with a profile of the mythological character of Jewry.

The stranger derives his danger, like his sacredness, from his membership of the 'extra-ordinary' world. If his danger is to be avoided he must either be denied admittance, chased or enticed away like evil spirits or vampires, or, if granted admittance, he must be socialised, that is to say secularised, a process which necessarily involves inversion. His transformation into the guest means therefore that, from being shunned and treated with hostility, he must be clasped to the bosom and honoured and given precedence; no longer to be suborned, he must be succoured; from being last, he must be first,¹⁵ from being a person who can be freely insulted he becomes one who under no conditions can be disparaged. The inversion implies a transformation from hostile stranger, *hostis*, into guest, *hospes*

12 'The first possible definition of the *sacred* is that it is the opposite of the profane' (M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York, 1959, p. 10).

13 'The sacredness of the stranger in many societies was recognised long before Van Gennep who refers to earlier discussions of this topic' (Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 36).

14 'Le sacré n'est pas une valeur absolue, mais une valeur qui indique des situations respectives. Un homme qui vit chez lui . . . dans le profane . . . vit dans le sacré dès qu'il part en voyage et se trouve, en qualité d'étranger, à proximité d'un camp d'inconnus' (Van Gennep, *op. cit.*, p. 16; cf. also p. 36 et sq.).

15 The guest who is received in a house for the first time is given precedence over its habitual guests with whom a greater familiarity exists. In the same way diplomatic etiquette forbids placing a countryman of the host in the place of honour if foreigners are present.

(or *hostis*),¹⁶ from one whose hostile intentions are assumed [102] to one whose hostility is laid in abeyance. The word *hostis* claims therefore as its radical sense, not the obligation to reciprocal violence, but the notion of 'strangeness' which underlies this transition. The further extension to *host* is perfectly congruent, since strangeness is logically reciprocal, whether it enjoins distrust or hospitality. Both senses of the word, *l'hôte*, are conserved in French which must find other ways to distinguish between host and guest. While the behaviour enjoined by the relationship is essentially reciprocal, just as gifts are, there is a difference between reciprocal hostility and reciprocal hospitality: the first is simultaneous, the second can never be. Host and guest can at no point *within the context of a single occasion* be allowed to be equal, since equality invites rivalry. Therefore their reciprocity resides, not in an identity, but in an alteration of roles. Even the hostile hosts of the Kwakiutl observed this order. The hostility which underlies the relation of '*hôtes*' which they express so explicitly ('we fight with property')¹⁷ can be vented, not in simultaneous combat, but (like the blows exchanged between the south eastern tribes of the Central Eskimo and their visitors) by turns. Reciprocity implies an alternation of roles, not an identity of roles. As Radcliffe-Brown saw in the case of avoidances and joking relationships, it is conflict which is prohibited; the laws of hospitality transpose the conflict to a level where hostilities are avoided.

This prohibition of the equality which leads to conflict applies to the beggar as well as to the guest, the one who cannot pay and the one who is not permitted to do so — is not a beggar simply one who aspires to be a guest? But if he aspires too assiduously, then his insistence implies a threat and at that point the host is liberated of all moral duty and instead of gaining honour by his charity he loses it through submitting to duress, for freedom of will is the first condition of honour. Therefore the claim of the beggar is paradoxically one which is lost if it is asserted as a right and from the moment it loses its character as supplication, it invites hostility. By pressing his claim too hard the would-be guest destroys its basis and falls back into the role of hostile stranger.¹⁸ By asserting his rights he denies his status, for even though a diffuse obligation exists towards the beggar, he is not endowed with any corresponding right. He establishes his status by humiliating himself in the admission of indigence and the reciprocity which he concedes in return is on behalf of God. The customs regarding begging in Andalusia may be taken to illustrate the matter. The beggar establishes his status by the demand for assistance in the name of God (*por Dios*). Once gratified he replies: '*Dios se lo pague*' (May God repay you). 'May God repay you' means 'Because I cannot'. Here the association between the beggar and the Deity takes on a subsidiary meaning: the axis of ex- [103] change is no longer on the mortal plane. Repayment will only be made in Heaven; there will be none on Earth. The beggar is so to

16 See Daremberg and Saglio, *op. cit.*, p. 303: 'D'après Servius, certains auteurs anciens employaient le mot *hostis* pour *hospes*.' The Greek word ξένος possesses the same two senses.

17 R. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (London, 1952) p. 136.

18 The problem of the 'sturdy beggars' in sixteenth-century England revolved around this distinction of roles. The nursery rhyme preserves the terms of the choice which they imposed on the villagers: 'some gave them black bread and some gave them brown, and some gave them a big stick and beat them out of town'.

speak trading in the name of God, under His protection. The name by which he is known, *pordiosero*, rubs in the point. The refusal of alms is traditionally made in a formal phrase which carries the same import: '*Vd. perdone por Dios, hermano*' (Excuse me, in God's name, Brother). The refusal to lay up store in Heaven and assume on Earth the honorific role of patron to the beggar, includes the assertion of equality with him ('brother'), since inability to do so is the only excuse for refusal valid in the eyes of God. An alternative form, '*Dios le ampare, hermano*' (May God protect you, Brother) carries the same implication: 'Because I am not going to.'

To beg is always and everywhere shameful for it implies a loss of personal autonomy which is the negation of honour. Hence those who are reduced to this expedient are regarded as the lowest and treated with the least respect of all the members of a community.¹⁹ This is not the case however, when they have sacerdotal status, for then they have not been 'reduced to begging'; their personal autonomy has been, not lost, but wilfully renounced. A vow of poverty derives from the will and commits it; it is not the same thing as the failed aspiration to affluence. We should recognise therefore that the action of begging does not suffice by itself to define the status of a beggar; the moral basis on which the begging is undertaken must be considered. Every town in Andalusia possesses a certain number of habitual beggars. These are known persons rather than strangers and they prey upon the local population. A certain number are gypsies whose reputation for shamelessness fits them for the role of beggar. Such beggars adopt a style which makes their loss of all claim to honour patent. They cringe and display their infirmity or their misery in such a way that no man can deny his good fortune in comparison with them and therefore his obligation to help them. But they are not the only persons who depend in fact upon charity. Andalusia is a land of large farms. Its rural proletariat live in their home town normally but go away to work either sporadically or regularly on a seasonal basis. Their lives are precarious and when necessity threatens they move forth in search of work. Frequently they find themselves away from home and without means of support, so that they are forced to depend on charity. Their style of begging is very different, however, from that of the professional beggar. They stop at the farm to ask for work and if none is offered, they expect and are prepared to ask for food to continue their journey in search for it. They are not seen begging on street-corners in the towns; they do not tug the sleeve of the passer-by; they do not cringe nor attempt to evoke pity and the techniques of moral blackmail practised by the beggars are denied them by their claim to shame. They [104] tend on the contrary to adopt a gruff and manly style to differentiate themselves from the professional beggars, for they are strangers, not beggars, and they sacrifice their shame no further than the implied (but not stated) confession of indigence. They are not referred to as *pordioseros*, for they do not invoke charity in the name of God, but simply as *pobres*, persons who in better times at home would be prepared to reciprocate charity. The distinction is made clear in a telling passage in the memoirs of Juan Belmonte. When as a novice bullfighter he travelled round the countryside with a companion, they were accustomed to stop at the farms and contrive to be fed for nothing by asking to buy ten centimes' worth of oil.

19 Cf. M. Mauss, 'Le don', in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, p. 258: 'Le don non rendu rend encore inférieur celui qui l'a accepté . . .'; cf. also p.169.

But one morning at a farm in Utrera which today is my own, the only answer I got was a dry *Dios le ampare, hermano*.

The conventional refusal to a beggar! My face fell with shame. Had I sunk to that? I was seized with a great depression and a terrible indignation against the good-for-nothing vagabond who had degraded my lust for adventure to such a level. At least the San Jacinto gang never begged its bread from door to door. If we were hungry we robbed an orchard in gay defiance of watch-dogs and armed guards.²⁰

The confusion between poor man and beggar is not commonly made, for the difference of status is usually clear from the style of begging. The distinction relates to the place of the supplicant within the social structure. 'Endomendicity' can promise no reciprocity other than through the Deity. 'Exomendicity' claims to be a system of undifferentiated exchange. The giver does not contemplate finding himself one day in the position of the endomendicant, for he has shame, but he may well expect to send his son off to seek work seasonally even if a change in his fortunes, the loss of his lease previously or of his post as bailiff, do not oblige him to take to the road himself. Therefore the response to the two types of supplicant are as different as their techniques. The honourable poor man may be received with honour (though this is not always the case); the professional beggar is treated with a disdain which the honourable man would not stomach. Moreover the former is a witness from the outside in whose eyes the reputation of the community is at stake, the latter is merely a nuisance and a threat. The former offers the opportunity of gaining honour through the role of patron, the latter is feared for her evil tongue and, as often as not, her evil eye. For there is a final difference between them: the former is more often a man, the latter more often a woman.

Convention demands that every stranger be made a guest in Andalu- [105] sia. The unincorporated stranger cannot be abided. The plebeian etiquette with regard to eating illustrates this general sentiment. The act of eating supposes a higher degree of intimacy than mere presence and to eat in front of a stranger is to offend this sentiment. His status must be changed therefore to that of guest and this is done by the formality of offering food. The diner at a wayside tavern or modest restaurant invites the new arrival with a standard phrase, the workman eating his lunch uses the same phrase to the passer-by, the traveller in the third class railway carriage presses his travelling companions to share his provisions before he will begin eating.

A similar custom is found in North Africa where it has been explained in terms of the magical danger of the envy of uninvited strangers who might well be possessed of the evil eye.²¹

My own experiences with regard to hospitality in the town which I have named Alcalá were not without significance. I was invited to a drink by persons of various social classes and it was not long before I was permitted to return such hospitality to members of the plebeian community and even to play the role of patron to

20 J. Belmonte, *Juan Belmonte, killer of bulls. The autobiography of a matador* (New York, 1937), p. 109.

21 Havelock Ellis, *The soul of Spain* (London, 1908), p. 17. It might be noted that whereas the evil eye is a female attribute in Andalusia, it is also exerted by *men* across the straits.

those with whom I had formed an appropriate relationship, but I was never permitted to pay for wine we had drunk together by men of the upper class of the town, the *señoritos*, who insisted always on maintaining my status as a guest. (I found it necessary to search for reciprocity in other ways.) They would use various formulae to explain their refusal: 'We shall all one day come to London and drink with you there. Then we shall ruin you' (laughter); or they would simply remind me that I was a foreigner and that they would be ashamed to let me pay in their town; or they would promise that next time I should be allowed to pay – a 'next time' which never came. The fact that I was never allowed to return hospitality within the town was significant above all (since I was accepted as a social equal in other ways), in regard to their conception of the stranger. For I was not only a stranger to the local community but to the national community – a foreigner, and an inquisitive one at that. The threat which I embodied was represented in the belief that I was a spy, which was discarded only after months of evident ineptness in that role. While my presence was in itself honorific, my potential hostility was nevertheless very great. Therefore I was never allowed to escape from my status as guest, where I had no rights, into that of community member where I might assert myself, make demands and criticisms and interfere in the social and political system. This long-extended hospitality for which I remain ever grateful carried the covert significance of a status barrier whereby the leaders of local society protected themselves from the threat that my strangeness represented. It was even suggested, after a minor govern- [106] mental authority with whom I had had a slight altercation happened to be transferred to another town, that I was really in the pay, not of the British government, but of the Spanish government. Zeus in disguise? An ingenuous young man hastened to take advantage of his connection with me to ask for a letter of recommendation which would get him into the secret police.

The extraneous example of my own experiences does not suffice to make clear the code of hospitality. The treatment of the stranger depends very much upon his social status. A person of high status honours the whole community by his presence and must be made a guest by a leading member, if he is not to be shunned as someone too suspicious to have any contact with. In fact, he can usually find someone with whom to establish at least a tie of common friendships. Persons of lower status frequently have similar contacts. There are also those who are glad to extend the range of their friendships as a source of prestige and with a view to an eventual reciprocity. The greatest overt distrust is that shown towards the groups of young men who come through the town on their way to the plains to seek work. The fact that they come in groups and that their destination is elsewhere makes them poor candidates for any form of hospitality.

There is however one class of stranger towards whom hostility is shown, the young men who come courting a local girl. An ancient custom relates how such a visitor was received. If he were not driven away by stoning he would be captured by the local lads and ducked in the fountain. It was not clear whether this might be done more than once, but if he survived this ordeal and persevered with his suit he was allowed to do so unmolested. He was then believed to have formed an unbreakable attachment to the place through the effect of the waters. It is not difficult to see the symbolism of this custom. The water of each *pueblo* is its pride and none is so brackish that it will not be proclaimed exceptional in taste and health giving qualities ('*una agua riquísima*', '*una agua muy sana*', etc.), superior to that of all neighbouring places. It is the source of the virtues of the inhabitants. The

stranger who has been submitted to the ordeal of ducking survives no longer as a stranger but as a member of the community, one who has been reborn from its 'source'.²² (The word used is either *pila* or *f fuente*. *Pila* means both 'font' and 'fountain', *f fuente* means both the town fountain and also 'source' or 'origin'. The town fountain is a white-washed edifice of great social importance as a meeting-place through which gossip is diffused and it is commonly surmounted by a cross). The hostile treatment is a prelude to acceptance at a level which is not attained by the guest. By presenting himself as a suitor the visitor denies his intention to depart; on the [107] contrary he asserts his aspiration to enter the kinship system as an affine, that is, to acquire rights in the community.

III

The law of hospitality is founded upon ambivalence. It imposes order through an appeal to the sacred, makes the unknown knowable, and replaces conflict by reciprocal honour. It does not eliminate the conflict altogether but places it in abeyance and prohibits its expression. This is true also of the avoidance and the joking relationship. But whereas the joking relationship suppresses the conflict by the prohibition to take offence, hospitality achieves the same end by the prohibition to give offence; one by forbidding respect, the other by enforcing it, or it might be put: the avoidance of respect and the avoidance of disrespect. Both relationships are placed outside the struggle for supremacy by a tacit agreement enjoined by custom, but, while the custom of the joking relationship invokes the desecrable and employs the language of pollution in the exchange of obscenities, the custom of hospitality invokes the sacred and involves the exchange of honour. Host and guest must pay each other honour. The host requests the honour of the guest's company — (and this is not merely a self-effacing formula: he gains honour through the number and quality of his guests). The guest is honoured by the invitation. Their mutual obligations are in essence unspecific, like those between spiritual kinsmen or blood-brothers; each must accede to the desires of the other. To this extent the relationship is reciprocal. But this reciprocity does not obscure the distinction between the roles.

It is always the host who ordains, the guest who complies. The guest must be granted the place of precedence and he must eat first, but precedence is defined in relation to the host, on his right hand as a rule. (Only royalty takes the head of the table in the house of another, for the obvious reason that royalty always ordains, cannot comply.) The duty of ordering the precedence among guests is the host's responsibility and the guest who is dissatisfied with his treatment has no recourse but to retire from his role altogether by walking out. An intermediary solution was once furnished in diplomatic etiquette by the convention whereby a guest, dissatisfied with his position at table, could call attention to an error of protocol of which he was the victim by the gesture of turning his plate over and thereby making it impossible to serve him. In this way he retired from his role until the error was

22 A recent article by Susan Tax Freeman, 'The Municipios of Northern Spain: a view from the fountain' in *Essays presented to Sol Tax* (in press) examines in detail the symbolic value of the fountain and marks the analogy between *pila*, the baptismal font, and *pila*, the fountain.

corrected, or at least until his protest had been registered, without showing any discourtesy to his host. To complain openly would infringe the host's prerogative in the placing of his guests, while to refuse the food would be impolite since refusal [108] implies distaste and depreciation and amounts therefore to an insult. The Spanish peasantry, conscious of this implication, commonly uses the expression '*para no despreciarlo*' (in order not to despise it) when accepting food or drink. In this way the guest exonerates himself from the implication of being greedy or demanding and maintains that he accepts only out of respect for the host. Thus tipsy farmers down their umpteenth glass with the righteous air of obligation.

Whether it is mandatory to refuse or accept, or to refuse at first and then accept, is a particularity of custom. The logic of the law of hospitality provides a justification for either refusal or acceptance: whether honour is done best by declaring the offer of hospitality excessive (which might imply distaste) or by demonstrating it to be welcome (which risks the implication that it may be taken for granted) is something which can only be known by reference to local convention. To gobble the peasant's lunch in the railway carriage in order not to show contempt for it is incorrect because there is no reason why he, rather than another, should play the host in such circumstances. To refuse the food he offers in his home is another matter.

The roles of host and guest have territorial limitations. A host is host only on the territory over which on a particular occasion he claims authority. Outside it he cannot maintain the role. A guest cannot be guest on ground where he has rights and responsibilities. So it is that the courtesy of showing a guest to the door or the gate both underlines a concern in his welfare as long as he is a guest, but it also defines precisely the point at which he ceases to be so, when the host is quit of his responsibility. At this point the roles lapse. The custom of the desert Arabs made this abundantly clear. Such was the sanctity of hospitality that the host's protection was assured even towards those for whom he felt enmity. To take advantage of a guest or fugitive was unthinkable. Yet hospitality bequeathed no commitment beyond the precincts of the domestic sanctuary, so his guest might become his victim the moment he stepped outside them. Hence it was the custom for the guest to leave silently and unannounced during the darkest hours of the night for fear he should be followed and struck down. The custom of the Kalingas shows by a curious variation the true nature of this sociological space defined by hospitality. When the guest of a Kalinga is a local man his host is responsible for his protection only within the confines of his property. His hurt or murder on the premises must be avenged by his host. But if the guest is a foreigner his host remains responsible for his protection throughout the entire region.²³ The range within which their complementary relationship holds good coincides with the territory where their mutual status is unequal. Where neither has a greater claim [109] to authority than the other their complementarity lapses. For, while a host has rights and obligations in regard to his guest, the guest has no right other than to respect and no obligation other than to honour his host. He incurs however the right and obligation to return hospitality on a future occasion on territory where he

23 R. F. Barton, *The Kalingas* (Chicago, 1949), p. 83. Regarding the status of stranger in Africa, see Meyer Fortes, 'Strangers' in *Studies in African Social Anthropology: essays presented to I. Schapera*, (eds.) M. Fortes and Sheila Patterson (London, 1975).

can claim authority. The reciprocity between host and guest is thus transposed to a temporal sequence and a spatial alternation in which the roles are reversed. Only then can the covert hostility be vented in customs such as the *potlatch* where rivalry takes the form of a hospitality which is more than lavish and where failure to reciprocate spells bankruptcy. The fable of the fox and the stork provides a model of the law of hospitality and an object lesson in its exploitation: an affront which masquerades as a generous and honorific gesture cannot be resented without violating the law of hospitality, since it is the host's privilege to ordain, but it can nevertheless be avenged by a similar ploy once the tables are turned.

For the same reason that the criminal is said to define the law the essentials of the law of hospitality can best be seen in the actions which constitute its infringement. How is the law of hospitality infringed? The detail varies of course from place to place. To inquire after the health of a spouse or child may be a requirement of good manners according to one code or a *faux pas* according to another. Yet a certain general sense informs them all, entitling us to talk about the *law* of hospitality in the abstract in contrast to the specific *codes* of hospitality exemplified by different cultures. There is, so to speak, a 'natural law' of hospitality deriving not from divine revelation like so many particular codes of law, but from sociological necessity.

A guest infringes the law of hospitality:

1. If he insults his host or by any show of hostility or rivalry; he must honour his host.
2. If he usurps the role of his host. He may do this by presuming upon what has not yet been offered, by 'making himself at home', taking precedence, helping himself, giving orders to the dependants of his host, and so forth. If he makes claims or demands, he usurps the host's right to ordain according to his free will, even where custom lays down what he should wish to ordain. To attempt to sleep with the host's wife²⁴ or to refuse to do so may either of them be infractions of a code of hospitality, but be it noted that the cession of the conjugal role always depends upon the host's will, like the precedence which he cedes. His wife's favours are always his to dispose of as he wishes. To demand or take what is not offered is always an usurpation of the role of host;
3. If, on the other hand, he refuses what *is* offered he infringes the role of guest. Food and drink always have ritual value, for the ingestion [110] together of a common substance creates a bond. Commensality is the basis of community in a whole number of contexts. Therefore the guest is bound above all to accept food. Any refusal reflects in fact upon the host's capacity to do honour; and this is what the guest must uphold. Therefore he may be expected to give thanks and pay compliments in order to stress that he is conscious of the honour done him. On the other hand it may be considered 'bad form' to do so since this implies that honour might not have been done and this in turn throws doubt on the host's capacity. The Victorian hostess who answered a florid compliment to her cook with the withering words: 'But did you expect to have bad food in my house?' made the point effectively. Failure to know what should be taken for granted can amount to

24 Cf. Van Gennep, *op. cit.*, p. 47 et sq.

insult. Therefore the details of codes of hospitality may be contraries, but, as in the treatment of twins or smiths in Africa, the contraries contain a common element of sociological meaning, which derives in this case from the law of hospitality.

A host infringes the law of hospitality:

1. If he insults his guest or by any show of hostility or rivalry; he must honour his guest.
2. If he fails to protect his guest or the honour of his guest. For this reason, though fellow guests have no explicit relationship, they are bound to forego hostilities, since they offend their host in the act of attacking one another. The host must defend each against the other, since both are his guests.
3. If he fails to attend to his guests, to grant them the precedence which is their due, to show concern for their needs and wishes or in general to earn the gratitude which guests should show. Failure to offer the best is to denigrate the guest. Therefore it must always be maintained that, however far from perfect his hospitality maybe, it is the best he can do.

It will be noted that, while the first clause is the same for both parties, the second and third are complementary between host and guest. This complementarity provides the systematic basis of the institution, which reaches its full symmetry in reciprocal hospitality when the roles of host and guest are exchanged. This is never the case with hospitality to a stranger whose chance of reciprocating necessarily remains in the blue. Lacking reciprocity between individuals, hospitality to the stranger can nevertheless be viewed as a reciprocal relationship between communities. The customs relating to the stranger therefore concern the degree to which he is permitted to be incorporated into a community which is not his own, and the techniques whereby this is effected. These may be divided into those which establish him as a permanent member of the local group and those which assume his departure in the future. [111]

If he comes only to visit, the visit may be returned, but if he intends to remain and change his affiliation, the reciprocity between communities ceases to operate.

An 'ordeal' implies permanence since its significance is essentially that it marks an irreversible passage: the element of hostility in the character of the stranger is destroyed and he is able to emerge from it in a more acceptable status. He is no longer unknown, he has been tried. He forfeits his association with the sacred and his call upon hospitality which derived from it. The passage of an ordeal entitles the stranger to remain in a new role, more nearly incorporated even if he is not granted the full status of community membership; he may still be subject to a personal bond with one of its members through affinity, artificial kinship or clientship. Yet whatever his subsequent status it provides him with a mode of permanent incorporation. Where an elaborate code of hospitality applies to the stranger and he is made a guest by the mere fact of his appearance without any 'ordeal', an impermanent relationship is implied. His hostile character is not destroyed but inverted through the avoidance of disrespect. A limit is frequently set upon the time such a guest is expected to stay and, even when this is not so, it is always recognised that it is an abuse to outstay one's welcome. Thus while the mode of permanent incorporation solidifies in time, the status of guest evaporates. The one faces a potential assimilation, the other an eventual departure. While it lasts, the tenuous nature of the relationship of host and guest depends upon respecting the complementarity of their roles. Any infringement of the code of

hospitality destroys the structure of roles, since it implies an incorporation which has not in fact taken place; failure to return honour or avoid disrespect entitles the person slighted in this way to relinquish his role and revert to the hostility which it suppressed. The sacred quality in the relationship is not removed, but polluted. Once they are no longer host and guest they are enemies, not strangers. Enemies *do* compete and it requires at least a tacit test of strength to determine which is the better man who will remain in possession of the field while the other takes his distance. The ordeal of the judicial combat may be appealed to so that Divine judgement may decide the matter or the struggle may be quite unformalised. The 'ordeal' which failed to take place on the way in takes place on the way out. Then the antagonists can part and become strangers again, in life or in death. This is why the process of reverting from guest to stranger in the Mediterranean follows a course reminiscent of that whereby the stranger was accepted in Eskimo society. Both represent variations on the theme of the ambivalence which underlies the law of hospitality. Both involve a combat which carries the host-guest relationship beyond that state of [112] suspended hostility in which the exchange of honour overlays the contrast of allegiances, but beyond it in one of two directions: it may lead either to incorporation or rejection. Yet the logical foundation of the problem is the same and it is this which explains, perhaps, the similarity between Boas' ethnographical account and the last scene of the *Odyssey*.²⁵

Epilogue

The feast has been going on for years when the old beggar turns up. He is not, as one of the guests suspects, a god in disguise but the host. Only the old dog knows and the discovery is too much for him. The place is in disorder: the master's substance is wasting, the suitors plague his widow (who is not his widow), the guests play the host, abuse the maid-servants and plot the son's murder.

A challenge is issued to a test of strength to see which guest can string the master's bow. The lady will espouse the winner, she says. Finally, when all have failed, the old beggar picks up the challenge amidst their scorn, and by the strength of his right arm triumphantly reveals his true identity. After that, of course, the slaughter begins. (How could one pardon guests who have so far usurped the role of host?) Anyway the gods see to it that no quarter be given, for it is justice which is at issue here, not sentiment. The world turns the right way up once more. Order and peace are restored.

25 In order to demonstrate the universal validity of the logic of the law of hospitality, I have deliberately taken evidence from different spheres: ritual custom, the conventions of manners, habitual practice and the inventions of the poet. It is not intended to imply that there is no difference between them and that they must not be distinguished for other purposes.